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ABSTRACT

A growing number of schools and districts are considering using teams to handle all types of decision making and advisory activities. The term "teams" can be applied to a wide spectrum of groups with various purposes or powers. This bulletin was designed to assist those who want to create efficient, successful teams. It provides suggestions on effective structures and practices for different types of work teams at the district and school levels. The total-quality-management principles of W. Edwards Deming provide the philosophical foundation for successful teamwork in schools. Chapter 1 introduces the concept of total quality management and explains what districts and schools have learned from the business world's experience with work teams. Chapter 2 provides the rationale behind the work-team approach to decision-making in schools and education, highlighting the advantages of using a team approach. The third chapter lists various types of teams used in education and offers examples from Oregon schools and districts. Team functions and members' roles are described in chapter 4, with a focus on the facilitator's relationship to other team members. The fifth chapter cites common problems and offers a platform for experienced team members and consultants to give advice on how to overcome those problems. The final chapter summarizes steps schools can take to ensure the success of their teams. A summary of quality work teams is included. (Contains 37 references.) (Author/LMI)

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# QUALITY WORK TEAMS

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# Preface

A recent article in a college magazine referred to "committee decisions" as an academic oxymoron. Many educators might agree with this sentiment. But for a growing number of other educators, team decision-making is the best thing to come out of two decades of school-reform efforts.

In Oregon, teaming is a state requirement. The Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century mandated site councils in all Oregon schools by September 1995. But site councils aren't the only teams being used by districts and schools to improve communication and accomplish tasks. Management teams, advisory committees, and specialty subgroups are addressing topics traditionally the forté of a sole superintendent, principal, or teacher.

A growing number of schools and districts are considering using teams to handle all types of decision-making and advisory activities. This Bulletin is designed to assist those who want to create efficient, successful teams.

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# Contents


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Preface** | iii |
| | **Introduction** | 1 |
| 1. | **The Relationship Between Total Quality Management and Work Teams** | 3 |
| | What Is Total Quality Management | 3 |
| | Deming and School Work Teams | 4 |
| | What Schools Can Learn from Business | 4 |
| | How TQM Drives Effective Teams | 5 |
| 2. | **Rationale for Work Teams** | 7 |
| | Why Teams | 7 |
| | Advantages of Team Decision-Making | 10 |
| | Some Reservations | 11 |
| 3. | **Types of Teams** | 13 |
| | Some Types of District Teams | 13 |
| | Some Types of School Teams | 14 |
| | Vertical Teams | 15 |
| | Horizontal Teams | 15 |
| | Case Studies: Teams in Oregon and Washington | 16 |
| 4. | **Team Functions and Roles** | 20 |
| | Determining Team Tasks | 20 |
| | Members: Understanding Roles | 21 |
| | Paying Attention to the Structure of Teams | 25 |
| | Initial Training | 25 |
| 5. | **Challenges and Problem-Solving** | 27 |
| | Why Teams Fail | 27 |

Individual Behaviors That Prevent Team Effectiveness 28
Barriers to Team Success 30
Problem Solving 30

6. **Successful Teams** 34
The Importance of Time 34
Steps for Success 35
Effective Meetings 36
Guidelines for Communication 37

**Conclusion** 41

**Bibliography** 42

**Interviews** 45

# Introduction

The term *teams* can be applied to a wide spectrum of groups with various purposes or powers. A group of same-subject teachers considering new textbooks is a team, as is a school council with authority over curriculum, personnel, and budgetary decisions.

The premise behind using teams is that education "can be greatly improved by simply strengthening the connections among people who work at all levels within the organization" (William G. Cunningham and Donn W. Gresso 1993). Ultimately, the argument for work teams in education is that students will benefit when more people with broader perspectives contribute their ideas and expertise to decisions about education.

This Bulletin evaluates the principles that govern small groups. It provides suggestions on effective structures and practices for different types of work teams at the district and school levels. Superintendents, principals, consultants, and team members provide a rich array of viewpoints and examples. On a philosophical level, this Bulletin offers the total-quality-management principles of W. Edwards Deming as a foundation for successful teamwork in schools.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of total quality management and explains what districts and schools have learned from the business world's experience with work teams.

Chapter 2 provides the rationale behind the work-team approach to decision-making in schools and education, highlighting the advantages of using a team approach.

Chapter 3 lists various types of teams used in education and offers examples from Oregon schools and districts.

Chapter 4 describes team functions and members' roles, emphasizing the facilitator's relationship to other team members.

Chapter 5 will perhaps be of most interest to members of new or struggling teams. It cites common problems and offers a platform for experi-

enced team members and consultants to give advice on how to overcome those problems.

Finally, chapter 6 summarizes steps schools can take to ensure their teams are successful.

*Chapter 1*

# The Relationship Between Total Quality Management and Work Teams

By the early 1990s, many businesses and public-sector organizations had reshaped the structure of their organizations, with self-managing work teams at the center of decision-making. Leaders in such organizations were realizing that "those closest to a process have a greater understanding of these processes and are therefore better able to improve performance." But how did they come to view teams as key decision-making entities? In large part, it was due to the influence of an American businessman named W. Edwards Deming, whose ideas transformed how Japanese businesses were managed. Deming is considered the founder of total quality management (TQM).

## What Is Total Quality Management?

In the business world, *TQM* is defined as "the method by which we achieve customer satisfaction" (Ann L. Wiley 1994). Michael Berger (1994) expands on this definition and illustrates how TQM calls for the use of work teams to accomplish its goals:

> TQM is a collection of elements beginning with continuous improvement, leading to supplier improvement, customer satisfaction, focus on employees and process improvement, which are established by teamwork and improved communications derived from employee training, vision, mission and guiding principles and upper management involvement, commitment and leadership.

When applied to education, *TQM* is defined as a system of manage-

ment that focuses on student achievement and worker satisfaction, involving "all administrators, teachers, and other employees," which uses "quantitative methods to continuously improve the organization's services and products" (Texas Association of School Administrators 1992). A detailed discussion of TQM appears in the OSSC Bulletin *Total Quality Management in Education* (James H. Johnson 1993).

## Deming and School Work Teams

In his book *Out of the Crisis* (1982), Deming listed fourteen points about management theory. One point taken to heart by educational theorists and administrators calls for breaking down barriers among departments. Charles A. Melvin (1991) says that in schools the "challenge has been to get everyone involved and do so in such a way that each individual recognizes he or she has something to contribute and does so without fear."

In Deming's view, instead of being "bosses," managers should collaborate with workers; his contention is that when people work together, the end result—the product—is of a higher quality. In other words, managers should cooperate, not coerce. When put into practice at schools, Deming's aproach is said to reduce competition among individuals and departments and increase the energy available for creating environments more conducive to learning (Yvonne Siu-Runyan and Sally Joy Heart 1992). In organizations that adopt Deming's philosophy, everyone must change perspectives. As Siu-Runyan and Heart explain, "Teachers and school executives must work together to rethink what they do, how they do it, and how they measure it."

> Creating a team to instigate change means "creating a phalanx—including the principal—of true believers who assume ownership of new ideas and learn strategies for implementing them and for winning adherents among their colleagues in the school community."
>
> —Gene I. Maeroff (1993)

Many education reformers are promoting Deming's views. To improve the *quality* of education, they contend, structural changes in the system must be made. "According to these reformers, most school problems originate from the system itself, and management is responsible for the system," Siu-Runyan and Heart note. "So, the way to generate improvement in schools is to reform school management."

## What Schools Can Learn from Businesses

In business, work teams give employees "control over everything from work schedules to how to perform the work and from hiring to firing," says

Maeroff. Such teams are "vehicles for increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and motivation at the worksite." Maeroff lists the assumptions that underlie the formation of such teams in business:

- Those closest to the work know best how to perform and improve their jobs.
- Most employees want to feel they "own" their jobs and are making meaningful contributions to the effectiveness of their organizations.
- Teams provide possibilities for empowerment not available to individual employees.

In the 1970s, corporations such as General Foods, Proctor and Gamble, and Digital Equipment Corporation shifted to the use of self-regulating work teams and experienced several positive results, including "greater innovation; improved employee attitudes; and reduced work stoppages, employee turnover, and absenteeism" (L. E. Scarr 1992).

Karolyn J. Snyder and Robert H. Anderson (1986) explain the function of teams in successful Japanese companies and recommend the same concepts be applied to public schools. In Japan, teams are formed either to solve problems or to meet a continuous need. Team objectives take precedence over individual objectives. "No individual credit or blame is given. Collectivism emerges from group work, causing people to work well together and to encourage better efforts."

Japanese business teams are responsible for team-leader selection, "job assignments, peer evaluation and control, absenteeism, record keeping, scheduling, budget, and evaluation," says Maeroff, and "sharing work decisions with management lies at the heart of team success."

What can educators learn from Japanese businesses? According to Snyder and Anderson, "Organizations that foster collaboration are more likely to be successful in achieving their goals" than those in which individuals perform isolated tasks.

## How TQM Drives Effective Teams

The American Association of School Administrators (*Creating...* 1992) stresses that work teams are integral to applying TQM principles at the school site: "One important tenet of systems thinking is to involve those closest to the 'action' in the decision-making process.... Decisions about a process are best made by cross-functional teams, which would include a representative of every step involved in that process."

Teams are given very specific goals and the freedom to attain those goals. As Murgatroyd and Morgan explain, "The team is empowered to

determine how it will achieve the goals it has been given in a context of a shared vision and understanding—in a climate of trust." Team members reflect, plan, and take action to achieve vision-related goals.

Carol Davis, deputy superintendent of Salem-Keizer School District, in Salem, Oregon, said administrators in her district are trained in TQM principles. "We are attempting to make ourselves more efficient but not exactly a business model. We use pieces that fit." Currently, the trainees are addressing the following questions: Should there be a process by which we all learn? How can we do things differently? Is it possible to make bureaucracies in schools and districts work quicker? How do the concepts of TQM apply to our district? Work teams in Davis's district conduct research and ask other school district partners and business partners about their experiences applying business techniques such as TQM to schools. Davis believes the application of TQM, embodied in work teams, is successful in her district, even though it's a striking change from what's familiar:

> Most of us have come up through a system that has operated really traditionally, a hierarchy. We're now trying to put the decision-making at the level where people are most affected. To do that you have to involve your community. I believe it's more cumbersome, more time-consuming, but the results seem to be more positive, and it's important for school districts to have a community that's in synch with where the district is moving. Teams help that happen.

Making the transition to TQM is not a smooth process, Davis concludes, "but it's worth it." Forming work teams based on the principles of TQM is a radical departure from how most educational institutions have traditionally been managed, but, as the next chapter suggests, the advantages make it worthwhile.

*Chapter 2*

# Rationale for Work Teams

*None of us is as smart as all of us.*
—Ernie R. Keller

There are many reasons group decision-making is preferable to individual decision-making in schools. As this chapter suggests, team members are accountable to others, which often increases the quality of their work. More and better information and actions emerge from a group of people with a range of backgrounds, experiences, and skills. Fresh ideas and outlooks are often presented in work teams, and members continually learn from one another. In addition, because more people are involved, there is a better chance mistakes will be caught and corrected. And perhaps most important, there is strength in the collective power of a group; therefore, risk-taking is both acceptable and probable.

## Why Teams?

The increasing demands placed on schools today, coupled with the decreasing funds available to treat student needs, makes collaboration—especially through work teams—essential. Some areas requiring collaboration identified by Snyder and Anderson include "managing and instructing staff members," developing materials, "researching influences on school achievement programs," and "creating models of schooling capable of launching schools well into the twenty-first century."

Work teams are effective because they "broaden and integrate responsibilities," says L. E. "Bud" Scarr, superintendent of Lake Washington School District in Kirkland, Washington:

> Whereas bureaucracies focus on inputs and processes, work teams

emphasize outcomes. Whereas bureaucracies define the process for employees, work team members create their own process. Members of work groups possess numerous skills and have relative autonomy and adequate information to make decisions concerning various tasks or services. They focus on what needs to be done as well as how they'll work together to get it done.

Simply put, teams are promoted as the best method to handle decision-making in schools and districts because those closest to the students are involved and empowered. Team members, who may include administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students, understand the needs and goals of a particular school or district.

Proponents also argue that teams are preferable because two heads—or three or twelve or one hundred—are better than one. In addition, when more people are involved in making a decision, the likelihood is greater that the decision will be implemented. Scarr explained in an interview that teams have much more power and capability than any one individual. "If you form a team right, the idea is that you're able to accomplish more and to broaden the brain base." Maeroff says team members do not have the "vulnerability" of being lone innovators, "are not hampered by the unwieldiness that comes with trying to make change agents of a whole faculty at once," and are "less apt to face attacks" from principals or others in the school community. Therefore, teams are better at risk-taking than individuals are.

### Getting the Work Done

In several ways, teams can bring about changes in schools, writes Maeroff:

- Teams can prioritize their ideas so they are not just randomly "dumped" on the school.
- Teams can model the kinds of behavior that they would like to elicit from colleagues.
- Teams can try to anticipate objections so answers can be provided before negative reactions are registered.
- Teams should remember that each member is only part of the team and does not speak for the entire group unless delegated to do so.
- Teams can make certain that team members interact with their colleagues.
- Teams should take every opportunity to spread ownership throughout the school community.
- Teams should strive to get time in the school's schedule to work on the change process with colleagues.
- Teams should keep the school community informed about their progress.
- Teams should be positive whenever possible.
- And, finally, team members should maintain a sense of humor about the serious work at hand.

**Bringing About Changes at the School Site**

School change can ensue from the establishment of teams at the school site, says Maeroff, for the following reasons:

- Team spirit, fueled by a common vision and a sense of bonding, can remind teachers who want to pursue change that they have compatriots.
- Process skills can enable teachers to interact in more constructive and productive ways.
- A more intellectual atmosphere can be fostered in the school by continuous discussion of substantial educational concerns.
- Teachers can begin to view themselves as resources for their peers and as researchers capable of generating new knowledge.
- New relationships with business, with foundations, and with higher education can help build a network of support for professional development that is largely based in the school.
- Closer links can be formed between professional development and the needs of the children in school.

**Four Reasons for Supporting Team Decision-Making**

Nancy Vollmer, school-improvement specialist for Linn-Benton-Lincoln Education Service District in Corvallis, Oregon, has been a member of teams as a teacher and administrator and has been a consultant on team development, group dynamics, and facilitation. She said,

> I feel strongly about team decision-making for lots of reasons. First, the *quality* of the decision is always enhanced because of the all of the different perspectives that come into the conversation. Also, more time is taken to make the decision, and so sometimes there are these serendipitous things that happen that allow even more quality to emerge.

For example, she said, group discussions may lead to the realization that more information is needed, so members proceed to research the topic and move in the right direction.

Another strength of team decision-making, said Vollmer, is its ability to generate a sense of *ownership*. "If you have more people involved in the decision, the possibility goes way up that it's going to be implemented because of the 'buy in' and the ownership, which then usually expedites the implementation because people understand."

Third, team decision-making can *empower* people as well as honor their views. This is related to how the group is facilitated and to group agreements; how the group is structured can also add to the empowerment.

A fourth strength of teams is the sense of "teamness," or group *cohesiveness*, they can create. "There's that feeling that it can happen." Vollmer says,

> In a team, the momentum gets going. There's a culture that can

> emerge when everything goes well. It's a sense of flow. . . . Everything seemed fragmented before, but all of a sudden there's a flow in the same direction, there's excitement, there's understanding.

## Advantages of Team Decision-Making

William Cunningham and Donn Gresso (1993) list several advantages associated with team decision-making in education: connections are developed among subgroups; organizational cohesiveness grows; a sense of school or district culture is enhanced; participants "gain new perspectives, insights, commitments, and cooperative efforts"; and the information, knowledge, and decision-making base is broadened. The philosophy behind teams is summed up by Keller: "None of us is as smart as all of us."

Teams enable everyone concerned about educational issues—from students and teachers to parents and school board members—to be involved in identifying and solving problems (John Lindelow and Scott Bentley 1989). Also, communication among stakeholders is improved, decisions are of higher quality, and trust is enhanced (Lindelow and Bentley).

Stephen Murgatroyd and Colin Morgan (1992) cite additional benefits of teams:

1. They maximize the creative talent within an organization and promote learning.
2. They are learning units in that they encourage the transfer of knowledge and skills.
3. They promote problem ownership.
4. They encourage a wider range of problem-solving than can be tackled by a single individual, especially when the teams are cross-functional.
5. Working as a team is more satisfying (when managed well and associated with team development and training) than working alone.
6. Team work carries lobbying power in terms of support for proposals that will lead to change.

Superintendent Scarr said the organizational structure of work teams is advantageous. "Organization is not just boxes, it's people. When you're on a team, you're no longer in a box. Using the knowledge you have in your organization is the most effective way" to get things accomplished. "That's the purpose of work teams."

Elaine Huntting, a parent in Scarr's district, is an active member of work teams at her children's schools. Huntting said teams comprised of parents as well as staff members have existed for only three years in her

children's elementary and junior high schools. Previously, she was only able to participate in parent-only organizations.

> We were never invited to be on committees with staff before. All the committees now have both parents and staff. I think it's better to have staff people (teachers, aides, sometimes principals) on committees, too, because then you get different perspectives.

Huntting sees several advantages to team decision-making. One is the feeling of empowerment. Another is the wealth of skills and experiences members bring to the team.

"A major advantage is that there is some discussion and listening to each other's perspectives," she said. "You get a whole spectrum of different experiences and ideas for what we want the children to be learning. And that's what we're there for—the children."

Finally, Huntting said, teams have another advantage for parents. "At the grassroots level, we see how things are affecting our own children, especially if we go into the classroom."

### Positive Effects of Teams

According to the American Association of School Administrators ("Vertical..." 1989), teams have the following positive effects on participants:

- Professionals view each other as helpful and supportive.
- They become more aware of the uniqueness of colleagues.
- They feel their input is valued.
- They introduce more risk-taking to improve instruction.
- They realize the potential consequences of individual decisions.
- They are aware of values about teaching and learning that are shared with others in a district.
- They know their strengths and take action to compensate for their limits.
- They value professional growth as crucial to satisfaction and personal effectiveness.

## Some Reservations

Unlike some other school-reform topics, the concept of quality work teams has few opponents. Perhaps this is because teams have been used in schools and districts only recently, so insufficient time has passed for research to reveal their weaknesses and shortcomings. But it seems more probable, based on a review of education articles, that work teams are simply leading to more positive results than negative ones. Still, a few educators expressed some reservations about teams that their proponents should take into account.

Carmen Chan, principal of Robert Frost Elementary School in Kirkland, Washington, believes a major problem with site councils is that school administrators are often still ultimately accountable for problems. Also, Chan, already putting in eighteen-hour days, recognizes that a council

might require even more of her time. "If you have to go through a site council for decisions, it takes time to process through how to make decisions and to train people in group decision-making." Conceptually, work teams are a great idea, Chan said, but in reality, she wonders if they are all they are made out to be.

Although Gene Maeroff (1993) generally supports teams, he is uncertain whether a team is always the proper unit for initiating change in a school. He warns, "Team building for school change is no panacea, and it carries no guarantees except the promise of an arduous journey that has no end."

The positive effects that can be brought about by teams are dependent on four things, write Murgatroyd and Morgan: (1) a commitment from the organization's leaders; (2) investment in team training and development; (3) an understanding that teams are "the basic unit for dealing with all activities within the organization"; and (4) specific mandates, deadlines, and resources being provided to the team.

Finally, it is important to note that not all decisions in a school or a district need to be made by teams: Routine decisions are and should be made daily by individuals at all levels—from students to superintendents. The next chapter clarifies what missions and goals are typically the responsibility of teams and gives examples of the types of teams that are commonly used to fulfill those missions.

*Chapter 3*

# Types of Teams

Teams vary in size, mission, and duration. There are districtwide teams and school councils—both of which are permanent groups with a general focus—as well as smaller subgroups designed to address individual tasks in a short time. This chapter provides a sampling of the types of teams being used in schools and districts today.

Karolyn Snyder and Robert Anderson (1986) list two major categories of school-based teams. *Permanent teams*, which "specialize in a particular function" such as curricular or age-level teaching, focus "over time for the organization." An example would be an instructional team comprised of the entire English department teaching staff. The second category is *temporary teams*, which are "organized for a particular short-term purpose and are dissolved when the task is completed." Examples would include a task force for K-6 math curriculum and a work team that oversees development of a gifted program for a high school.

## Some Types of District Teams

At the district level, the most common type of team is the management team, which usually includes the superintendent and other central-office administrators, and possibly a board of education member and principals. Management teams have responsibility for districtwide policies, missions, or decision-making. Many subgroups may also be found at the district level.

Nancy Vollmer, of Linn-Benton-Lincoln ESD in Albany, Oregon, said districts in the five county region she serves are using more work teams because "they build ownership and understanding by being a good communication tool." Many Oregon districts have a district team with members from each school-site council. These districtwide teams have different purposes, but usually they act in a liaison role, helping to ensure districtwide consistency in policies.

A district subcommittee that Vollmer worked with, for example, was established to revise some curriculum for that district. Such subcommittees work with the schools and the district office staff and present their findings to representatives of each group. Examples of district subcommittees are subject-area teams, such as humanities, science or technology.

## Some Types of School Teams

Management teams—also called *administrative teams* or *leadership teams*—can also be found at the school level. Generally, management teams assist the principal in decision-making. Therefore, many site-based councils could be considered administrative teams. Leonard O. Pellicer and others (1990) found that the "most effective schools had functioning administrative teams, and supplementary advisory bodies to assist in the problem-solving, planning, and decision-making processes. The team provided a focus for appropriate delegation of responsibility and authority."

Snyder and Anderson list some of the kinds of work teams that can be found at the school site: subject-area teams, leadership teams, instructional teams, vertical curriculum teams, task forces structured to produce a product, planning teams, schoolwide goal-setting teams, training teams, social-functions committees, outside-school-activities teams, evaluation task forces, human-relations committees, parent-advisory groups, and faculty-advisory groups.

In addition to the leadership team, broad specialty teams in a school can include:

- *Production teams*: Committees, work groups, or other units with assigned responsibilities, such as production of a video program for visitors to the school.
- *Curriculum-development teams*: Teams assigned to coordinate the school program (for example, K-6, K-12, 7-12), usually within specific content areas. A mathematics team in an elementary school, for example, should include one math-responsible delegate from each grade- or unit-level, and the team's job would be to make sure the K-6 math program has good flow, continuity, and validity.
- *Councils and study groups*: Teachers and parents or others from outside the school concerned with review and analysis of questions, topics, or concerns.
- *Task forces*: Groups on special assignments of schoolwide interest (for example, a task force to develop a schoolwide program for creatively gifted students). (Snyder and Anderson)

## Vertical Teams

Vertical teams are made up of individuals from different levels of an organization who join together to accomplish a task or engage in planning. In a district, a vertical team might consist of administrators from high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools, while in a single school it might include a superintendent, principal, teachers, support staff, parents, and students. For example, Snyder and Anderson describe a vertical curricula team that has representatives from each school level—preschool, primary, intermediate, middle school, and secondary—and that is responsible for ensuring a specific program (such as science or math) has "appropriate cohesion and continuity" from kindergarten through grade 12.

The general missions of vertical teams are consistency and trust-building. Establishing such teams facilitates "the important exchange of information among individuals who share a common purpose but operate on different levels and who thus have very different organizational perspectives," write Cunningham and Gresso. Such teams facilitate the development of a "shared culture that supports implementation efforts and creates long-term school effectiveness." Without this shared culture, "school effectiveness programs are either never implemented or disappear after implementation" (Cunningham and Gresso).

Bend-LaPine is an example of an Oregon school district that uses vertical teams. Superintendent Scott Mutchie's new management system includes one superintendent, one assistant superintendent, four horizontal teams, and three vertical teams, as well as school-site councils. Each vertical team consists of representatives from high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools in one of three regions within the district, as well as supervisory members. Vertical teams "make sure communication goes on between K-12 and we're on track as far as standards across the grades," said Mutchie. The vertical teams research problem areas, evaluate textbook materials and adoptions, determine ways to meet state requirements, and set timelines.

## Horizontal Teams

The Texas Association of School Administrators defines *horizontal quality teams* as consisting of "individuals who come together from the same levels of an organization or from different organizations with similar goals and missions." For example, all third-grade teachers in a school or all the principals in a district could be a horizontal team.

The Bend-LaPine School District has four horizontal teams. One team consists of all high school principals in the district; another is middle school

principals; the third is elementary principals; and the fourth is central-office supervisors. Each team determines what goes on "horizontally" at its school level. In Bend-LaPine, decision-making is cyclical, said Superintendent Mutchie. Communication flows back and forth between the horizontal and vertical teams.

## Case Studies: Teams in Oregon and Washington

The Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century mandated site councils at all of the state's schools. Often, schools and districts have other teams in place as well, such as administrative teams and subgroups of the site council. The following information was obtained from interviews with personnel in five school districts in Oregon and Washington.

More details about these and other schools and their site councils can be found in two Oregon School Study Council Bulletins: *School-Based Management: Rationale and Implementation Guidelines* (Lori Jo Oswald, March 1995) and *School-Site Councils: The Hard Work of Achieving Grassroots Democracy* (David Peterson - del Mar, February 1994).

### Schools Served by Linn-Benton-Lincoln Education Service District

At the school level, site councils in the three counties served by Linn-Benton-Lincoln Education Service District are charged with improving the instructional program, overseeing professional development of the staff, administering costs-in-aid and implementing the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century. "The council is the keeper of the vision," said Nancy Vollmer.

Besides site councils, Vollmer said there are many ad hoc committees or subcommittees in the schools. "I'm working with a short-term group right now whose charge is to design a proposal for a student self-management program for the school." The site council oversees these ad hoc committees. The site councils have a more formal long-term structure, whereas the focus of the ad hoc committees are more variable in composition, time involvement, and focus.

### Salem-Keizer School District

Carole Davis, deputy superintendent of the Salem-Keizer (Oregon) School District, described the types of teams active in her district. The superintendent, deputy superintendent, administrative assistant to the superintendent; directors of personnel, business services, community services, student services and the district's five areas of operation; and two principals

make up the cabinet, which functions as a team. "We have representatives from all the areas of responsibility of the district," said Davis. "The cabinet is the management leadership and problem-solving group. Each of us brings to it a different perspective." Topics discussed include staff issues, budget, policy, regulations, and organization.

There are several other teams at the district level. Davis told how a unique team came into existence:

> We had an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives of the board, cabinet, staff and comunity to figure out how to work with Goals 2000, the Oregon Educational Act, and school improvement. All of the committees within the district were reviewed to see how they related to the Mission and Student Learning Goals.
>
> As a result, we found that missing was a group of people who understood how the district operates, knew the community and were able to take an idea from our citizens group, the board, superintenent or cabinet and make it functional. So we developed the *Core Team*.

The Core Team's major purpose is to facilitate the strategic improvement for meeting the Oregon Educational Act requirements. Each person on the Core Team, Davis said, agrees that the Mission and Student Learning Goals are the focus of our school improvement/reform efforts. The members, who meet twice a month, are facilitators, not decision-makers.

Three additional teams, called work groups, were formed last year to help achieve the district mission. A member of the Core Team is a liaison to each of these work groups—a decision-making group, which determined the process for decision making in the district; an organizational effectiveness group, which deterines whether the district is really organized to produce the desired results; and a student learning-goals group, which focuses on certificates of initial and advanced mastery by addressing curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Whereas the Core Team has eight to ten members, the size of the work groups ranges from twenty-four to over one hundred members. The size of a team depends on the scope of the charge and how many people it takes to complete that charge, Davis said. "Since we believe in involvement of all the stakeholders, the number of participants increases." The largest work group, the student learning goals group, is divided into smaller components as that task is enormous.

According to McKay Area Operations Director Winston Miller, individual schools in the Salem-Keizer district determine the structure of their site councils (Oswald, March 1995). Each school in the district also decides how council members will be selected and determines the degree of participation the principal, teachers, classified staff, parents, and community members will have.

The principal's role may be facilitator, coordinator, or administrator in relation to the council, depending on the council's structure and purpose. The central office emphasizes that decisions made at the site should not be "made in isolation behind closed doors by just one person," said Miller. "There is plenty of input; there is plenty of involvement of the staff and community in making those decisions."

As well as site councils, schools often have other teams in place. For example, North Salem High School has an *administrative team*, which is made up of the principal, the assistant principals, and the office manager. This team makes decisions regarding management of the school, safety, personnel, and budget. It also manages the school calendar, student activities, athletic events, community events, and public relations.

The high school's *leadership team*, made up of administrators and department coordinators, works with the faculty to give input to the principal in the areas of management, staffing, budgeting, and building the master schedule. Other subcommittees, such as the technology committee, faculty advisory committee, discipline committee, and faculty welfare committee, provide feedback to the leadership team, department coordinators, and site council regarding needs, concerns, and priorities.

**Richmond Elementary School**

In Richmond Elementary School (Salem, Oregon), a twelve-to-fifteen member 21st Century Council, composed of administrators, teachers, classified staff (including a counselor), and parents, has as its main focus improving the learning environment (Oswald, March 1995). Agendas and timelines are determined by the committee. Decision-making by the committee is generally done through either consensus or voting, with the principal retaining the final authority over decisions.

An administrative-support team with a family-involvement coordinator, a Chapter 1 teacher, and four team leaders meets biweekly with the principal to discuss district issues that have implications for the school building. The team also discusses the school's internal policies regarding discipline, scheduling, and other administrative issues. When the principal requires additional staff input, the team leaders first consult with their respective teacher groups, then provide feedback to the principal.

**James Madison High School**

At James Madison High School in Portland, Oregon, the site council has the following duties: improving the school's instructional program, developing and implementing a plan to improve the professional growth and career opportunities for staff, coordinating the implementation of the Oregon

Educational Act for the 21st Century at the local school level, and fostering family-school partnerships (Oswald, March 1995).

Several subcommittees assist the council in meeting its goals. These teams include budget; curriculum and instruction; grants and grant development; professional development; school affairs; and instructional technology. Membership on the subcommittees includes faculty, students, and parents, and one member of the site council resides on each committee.

**Lake Washington School District**

In 1991, with 38 schools, 24,000 students, 2,200 employees, and a still-growing district, Lake Washington School District in Kirkland, Washington, decided to reorganize its central-office staff, building administrators, and support personnel into four work teams. L.E. Scarr (1992) describes how this arrangement works:

> The three regional teams each include one high school and the schools that feed into it. These teams focus on supporting the operations and restructuring efforts of schools in their area. A fourth team provides services to schools and teams including business, facilities, and personnel....
>
> Approximately 12 schools are assigned to each of the three regional teams. Each team is made up of approximately 75 people: principals, central office administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and businesspeople. Teams are divided into subgroups charged with specific responsibilities and tasks.

Scarr said Lake Washington formed work teams for two reasons: (1) They transformed the focus "from a narrow, compartmentalized view to a broad and far-reaching perspective," and (2) teams met the "need to create a structure for participation" by involving people from all levels of the organization.

The teams have one overriding mission outlined by a districtwide commission: increasing students' "mastery of relevant skills, knowledge, and abilities." Barriers encountered in Lake Washington included confusion about roles and responsibilities, allocation of resources, and difficulty in working effectively with others. But Scarr viewed this as "a period of ambiguity" that had to be worked out.

There is considerable information available on types and functions of teams, but ultimately district's or school's own needs will determine what type of team is needed. The next chapter examines the kinds of functions a team performs and the roles and responsibilities of team members.

*Chapter 4*

# Team Functions and Roles

*What counts is that the team is honed into an instrument that can deal with the process of change itself.*
—Gene I. Maeroff

There are almost as many purposes and levels of power in teams as there are teams. But most teams adopt the same basic structure and define members' roles similarly. This chapter provides information on what these structures and roles are, as well as describes what every new work team needs to learn to function effectively.

## Determining Team Tasks

Those writing about work teams agree on at least one point: the team's mission must be clear to all team members. The first task of a team should be to agree on what its mission is. After that, it is useful to determine who will be the facilitator and what his or her roles will be, what the others' roles will be, what the responsibilities of the team are, and how a final decision will be agreed upon. Other matters to be determined are "specific planning and reporting systems," composition of the team (Will it include parents, teachers, students, the principal, community members?), "expected project outcomes and deadlines," and "communications systems" (Snyder and Anderson).

Generally, every team and every team meeting focuses on one or more of the following objectives: informing; planning; problem-solving; decision-making; training; evaluating; or increasing morale, cooperation, and communication (Margot Helphand 1994).

# BULLETIN IN BRIEF

OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL

Condensed from OSSC Bulletin

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## Quality Work Teams

*By Lori Jo Oswald*

Using work teams to make decisions, research problems, and advise on solutions is increasingly popular in school districts and schools. The tremendous demands placed on schools today, coupled with the decreasing funds available to treat student needs, make collaboration—especially through work teams—essential.

Teams are promoted as the best method to handle decision-making in schools and districts because those closest to the students are involved and empowered. Team members, who may include administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students, understand the needs and goals of a particular school or district.

### TQM and Work Teams

By the early 1990s, many businesses and public-sector organizations had reshaped the structure of their organizations, with self-managing work teams at the center. In large part, credit for this shift can be given to an American businessman named W. Edwards Deming, whose ideas transformed how Japanese businesses were managed. Deming is considered the founder of total quality management (TQM).


The Oregon School Study Council—an organization of member school districts in the state—is a service of the College of Education, University of Oregon.

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In Deming's view, instead of being "bosses," managers should collaborate with workers; his contention is that when people work together, the end result—the product—is of a higher quality. When put into practice at schools, Deming's approach is said to reduce competition among individuals and departments and increase the energy available for creating environments more conducive to learning (Yvonne Siu-Runyan and Sally Joy Heart 1992). "Teachers and school executives must work together to rethink what they do, how they do it, and how they measure it."

To improve the *quality* of education, reformers contend, structural changes in the system must be made. "According to these reformers, most school problems originate from the system itself, and management is responsible for the system," Siu-Runyan and Heart note. "So, the way to generate improvement in schools is to reform school management."

### Rationale for Work Teams

There are many reasons group decision-making is preferable to individual decision-making in schools. Team members are accountable to others, which often increases the quality of their work. More and better information and actions emerge from a group of people with a range of backgrounds, experiences, and skills.

Fresh ideas and outlooks are often presented in work teams, and members continually learn from one another. In addition, because more people are involved, there is a better chance mistakes will be caught and corrected. And perhaps most important, there is strength in the collective power of a

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group; therefore, risk-taking is both acceptable and probable.

Teams enable everyone concerned about educational issues—from students and teachers to parents and school board members—to be involved in identifying and solving problems (John Lindelow and Scott Bentley 1989).

Elaine Huntting, a parent team member, sees several advantages to team decision-making. One is the feeling of empowerment. Another is the wealth of skills and experiences members bring to the team. "You get a whole spectrum of different experiences and ideas for what we want the children to be learning. And that's what we're there for—the children," she said.

## Types of Teams

Teams vary in size, mission, and duration. There are districtwide teams and school councils—both of which are permanent groups with a general focus—as well as smaller subgroups designed to address individual tasks in a short time.

Karolyn Snyder and Robert Anderson (1986) list two major categories of school-based teams. *Permanent teams*, which "specialize in a particular function" such as curricular or age-level teaching, focus "over time for the organization." An example would be an instructional team comprised of the entire English department teaching staff.

In contrast, *temporary teams* are "organized for a particular short-term purpose and are dissolved when the task is completed." Examples would include a task force for K-6 math curriculum and a work team that oversees development of a gifted program for a high school.

### District Level

At the district level, the most common type of team is the management team, which usually includes the superintendent and other central-office administrators, and possibly a board of education member and principals. Management teams have responsibility for districtwide policies, missions, or decision-making. Many subgroups may also be found at the district level.

Vertical teams are another type of district-level team gaining in popularity. Vertical teams are made up of individuals from different levels of an organization who are charged with accomplishing a task or engaging in planning. Administrators from high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools in one district can make up a vertical team.

### School Level

Management teams can also be found at the school level. Generally, management teams assist the principal in decision-making. Snyder and Anderson list some of the kinds of work teams that can be found at the school site: subject-area teams, leadership teams, instructional teams, vertical-curriculum teams, task forces structured to produce a product, planning teams, schoolwide goal-setting teams, training teams, social-functions committees, outside-school-activities teams, evaluation task forces, human-relations committees, parent-advisory groups, and faculty-advisory groups.

## Team Functions and Roles

There are almost as many purposes and levels of power in teams as there are teams. But most teams adopt the same basic structure and define members' roles similarly. The first task of a team should be to agree on what its mission is. After that, it is useful to determine who will be the facilitator and what his or her roles will be, what the others' roles will be, what the responsibilities of the team are, and how a final decision will be agreed upon.

Generally, every team and every team meeting focus on one or more of the following objectives: informing; planning; problem-solving; decision-making; training; evaluating; or increasing morale, cooperation, and communication (Margot Helphand 1994).

### The Leader's Role

With school-site councils now mandatory in Oregon, school boards, superintendents, central-office administrators, and principals need to reexamine their roles and determine what functions and powers will be assumed by the council. The Oregon Professional Development Center (1995) advises: "Principals should broaden their leadership styles to include a role which makes them a 'leader of teams'."

David D. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (1989) believe leaders' new role of empowering their staff

by organizing them into teams is "the most important aspect of leadership."

### The Facilitator's Role

The facilitator is the one who balances team members' emotions, as well as topics and time. Generally, the facilitator helps the group get organized, become more effective, determine and accomplish goals, and have worthwhile and enjoyable meetings (Helphand). Specifically, the facilitator ensures group members understand the purpose and agenda of each meeting, delegates responsibilities, sees to it that meetings stay on track and start and end on time, and determines how much time to devote to each agenda item. After each meeting, the facilitator checks with team members regarding their progress on assigned tasks.

Consultant Ernie Keller often becomes the facilitator in grant-proposal teams. He said a big part of the facilitator's role is to suggest when people get together, help facilitate the agenda during and after the meeting, take the basic minutes of the minutes, do the pick and shovel work between meetings, and develop a draft so that people can come back and look at it.

## Challenges and Problem-Solving

Nancy Vollmer (no date) notes five reasons offered by Larry Lezotte regarding why teams fail to work together effectively: (1) members don't understand "the function, purpose, or goals of the team effort," (2) members don't understand their roles or responsibilities, (3) members don't understand "how to do their tasks or how to work as part of a team," (4) members fail to "buy into" the "function, purpose, or goals of the team effort," and (5) members "reject their roles or responsibilities."

All these problems are solvable, says Gene Maeroff (1993). Schools must recognize that teams will help build unity and comradeship. Money spent on team-building is money well spent. Be aware that teaming will not solve everything, including changing those who do not want to change or who are "incapable of improvement."

Almost everyone interviewed for the Bulletin advocated hiring trainers to teach group communication skills early on. Training can help team members to understand the structures, strategies, and philosophy of quality work teams and move to a higher level of "teamness"; that is, it can enhance their understanding of group dynamics, and show them how to lead effective meetings, how to ask for help from a consultant or secure someone to intervene, and how to deal with conflict.

## Successful Teams

The Kansas State Board of Education says that in effective teams all members "feel responsible for the team, the goals it has set, and the success of its activities." Also, all members are allowed to express their views before important decisions are made together. Meeting agendas and activities are specifically planned, but the team can change these if the need arises. In addition, when members try new skills, the team is supportive. Finally, the team engages in an ongoing process of self-evaluation.

### Guidelines for Communication

How team members treat each other is perhaps the most important part of team success. "I find that people need to be fairly frank about things," said Keller, "but generally teams work a lot better if people treat each other with respect."

The Institute for Educational Leadership (1994) offers the following tips to ensure quality communication in teamwork: limit talking time by remembering there are others in the group, don't interrupt, listen actively, allow others to be silent if they wish but try to elicit their views by asking questions or their opinions, encourage rather than dominate, offer *constructive* criticism (build up instead of tear down), accept others' opinions even if you don't agree with them, and support those who are unfairly attacked.

### The Necessity of Conflict

It may come as a surprise to some, but conflict is actually an essential element in successful teams. Effective teams "engage in controversy to ensure that all alternative solutions get a fair hearing" (Johnson and Johnson). And while negative personal attacks on others should be discouraged, "differing views about tasks, policies, procedures, allocation of resources, and other group issues can actually be helpful" (Helphand).

"Conflict can be very helpful to a group's work if they can sustain and get through the emotional

level, because great ideas come out of it," says Helphand. Keller agrees: "Conflict is a powerful engine. Sometimes the fact there's a conflict might be the very reason people show up for a meeting."

## CONCLUSION

The most effective work teams set clear goals, keep connections strong between the team and other stakeholders such as administrators and teachers, hire a professional trainer initially to teach group communication strategies, and ensure the roles of team members are clearly defined. And always, no matter what the purpose of the team, members are aware that improved student learning is the ultimate mission.

Educators who have experimented with teams generally agree that districts and schools should make use of teams for decision-making, planning, and action. But each individual's qualities and contributions should be recognized and valued as well.

Forming work teams based on the principles of TQM is not easy, and it's radically different from how most educational institutions have traditionally been managed, but the end results make it worthwhile.

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## Members: Understanding Roles

To determine who should be on each team, consider the skills necessary and determine each member's role. Also, consider the size of the team needed, the strengths and weaknesses in leadership and other team functions of individual members, the members' talent and skills, the team's purpose, the overall school mission, the number of task forces needed, the time required and time available from members, and the members' willingness to receive training in group problem-solving, planning, and group leadership (Snyder and Anderson).

Team members must be committed and motivated. "You have to have someone with the time and interest to work on this," said Keller, "not people who are lukewarm." Also, members need to have something to offer to the team—such as knowledge, ideas, and enthusiasm that motivates them to produce well-supported and thought out recommendations.

Teachers in particular may find teamwork especially challenging, says Maeroff, because "the measure of most teachers' success usually rests on how adept they are at working on their own." Training in teamwork is not intended to break down this "separateness." Rather, trainees "are meant to return to their buildings as a cadre of committed individuals eager to engage in educational discussions and available for mutual reinforcement," says Maeroff. "Together, they launch a crusade. The Holy Grail they seek is better education for students."

Davis believes teams are stronger when there is diversity among members. "Traditionally, you would have all special-education people sit down and discuss special-ed problems," she said, but now district teams incorporate people from many schools, grade levels, and programs; teams also include people of different ages and experiences. "This brings all of the perspectives together, and we usually end up with a solution that we don't have to 'sell' because every group has some input."

Team members need to be aware of the roles and responsibilities they will be expected to assume. Major roles are outlined below.

### The Leader's Role

With school-site councils now mandatory in Oregon, school boards, superintendents, central-office administrators, and principals need to reexamine their roles and determine what functions and powers will be assumed by the council. The Oregon Professional Development Center (1995) advises:

> Principals should broaden their leadership styles to include a role which makes them a "leader of teams." The effective administrator has a clear understanding of legislative reform; can lead work teams; and understands the principles of meeting management, conflict resolution, and group facilitation.

Keeping communication channels open and delegating authority to team members are responsibilities of the team leader, state Lindelow and Bentley. It is wise to give a presentation to the work team early on to make members aware of how the team's work dovetails with the district's or school's mission, vision, and goals (Helphand).

A report from Mt. Edgecumbe High School (1990) in Sitka, Alaska, identifies various approaches to decision-making:

1. *Decide and announce*. Leader makes a decision and announces it.
2. *Gather input and decide*. Leader collects information from members then makes the decision.
3. *Gather input from team and decide*. Leader calls a team meeting to collect input then decides.
4. *Consensus*. Leader and team reach a decision everyone understands and is willing to actively support.
5. *Delegate Consensus*. Leader delegates the decision to the team.

Administrators need to recognize the significance of work teams. David D. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (1989) believe leaders' new role of empowering their staff by organizing them into teams is "the most important aspect of leadership."

**The Facilitator's Role**

The facilitator is the one who balances team members' emotions, as well as topics and time. Generally, the facilitator helps the group get organized, become more effective, and determine and accomplish goals, as well as ensures meetings are worthwhile and enjoyable (Helphand). Specifically, the facilitator ensures group members understand the purpose and agenda of each meeting, delegates responsibilities, sees to it that meetings stay on track and start and end on time, and determines how much time to devote to each agenda item. After each meeting, the facilitator checks with team members regarding their progress on assigned tasks.

The Oregon Professional Development Center advises councils to hire neutral trained facilitators. Such facilitators can assist councils with their process by "summarizing, reading a group, helping a group which has stalled, resolving conflicts, and employing various group decision-making techniques."

Vollmer (no date) lists the components of meetings that the facilitator can be responsible for:

- planning and preparing for the meeting
- setting goals by building an agenda
- coordinating tasks

- charting decisions, timelines, etc. during the meeting
- helping attend to group and interpersonal processes
- evaluating how well activities meet goals and how satisfying and helpful interpersonal processes are
- planning ways of following through on plans

Elaine Huntting, parent team member, believes the best facilitators avoid or quell personality issues. "Sometimes people don't agree—it's going to happen because we're human. But sometimes people *really* disagree. If the facilitator is the kind of person who can keep personalities out of it and stay with the facts and avoid pointing fingers, the group is definitely more successful." Sometimes people's feelings get hurt, said Huntting, because others don't agree with them. "If the facilitator can stay above that kind of thing, it works much better, especially when it gets down to people's children. People are passionate about their children and their children's education, more so than anything in which I've ever been involved."

### Qualities Needed By Facilitators

The American Association of School Administrators (no date) recommends that facilitators should have:

- the superintendent's and board's confidence
- credibility with other team members
- a "non-controlling, others-centered ego"
- an interest in trying new ideas and in lifelong learning
- the ability to adjust to changing needs, conditions, and priorities
- "a vision of what might be that is beyond current practice and conventional wisdom"
- a goal-directed personality
- the ability to bring out the best in colleagues
- the ability to stick with a long-term project
- patience, encouragement, and flexibility

Even facilitators can get passionate. Huntting recalled a meeting where the facilitator could no longer stay neutral: "One facilitator got so upset, he gave the role to someone else, and physically got up, moved, so he could give his opinion. I don't know if it's technically allowed, but I think it's always good for everyone to say what they want to say about an issue."

Consultant Ernie Keller often becomes the facilitator in grant-proposal teams. He said,

> The big part of the facilitator's role is to suggest when people get together, have a facilitating agenda, help facilitate the agenda during and after the meeting, take the basic minutes of the meetings and work sessions, do the pick and shovel work between meetings, and develop an evolving draft so that team members are keyed into and focused immediately at subsequent meetings.

Keller said the facilitator cannot be too thin-skinned. "He has to let people say, 'This can be done better this way and that way'." Also, Keller believes it's acceptable for the facilitator to disagree when it seems appropri-

ate, for the facilitator has more than "token involvement."

### The Recorder's Role

Before each meeting, the recorder can do the following, advises Vollmer (no date):

- Review with the facilitator the proposed agenda for the current meeting and the minutes of the previous meeting.
- Gather materials necessary to record what decisions are made at the meeting.

During each meeting, the recorder should

- Describe the setting for the meeting (place, date, time, and so forth).
- List the participants.
- Copy the agenda in the order agreed upon.
- During each agenda item, record the major views expressed and information offered.
- At the end of each agenda item, write a short summary of decisions made, understandings achieved, and action to be taken.

Finally, after each meeting, the recorder would want to collect any charts developed during the meeting to use in typing a copy for the minutes; check the clarity and completeness of the minutes with facilitators; ensure the minutes are typed, copied, and distributed to all members and posted for nonmembers' information."

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR FACILITATORS**

- ask open-ended questions
- ask close-ended questions
- use requests
- use positive reinforcement
- ask for specifics
- redirect questions/defer to group
- encourage under- and nonparticipators
- ask for different points of view
- paraphrase for clarity and understanding
- use nonverbal reinforcement

—Margot Helphand

### Process Observer

To some extent, each member of a team is a *process observer*, a role that Vollmer (no date) defines as "examining the effectiveness of interactive processes soon after every meeting." Vollmer recommends every team spend the last fifteen minutes engaged in "process observing" (also called "debriefing"), to be "aware of its own dynamics."

In addition to this, however, one member should be designated the "process observer" and have the following responsibilities (Vollmer):

- Learn what the team wants you to observe during the meeting.

- Pay particular attention to the group process (as well as the content) during meetings.
- Record observations and impressions about meeting effectiveness.
- Organize this information for dispersal to the group.
- Report observations to the other team members, making sure to "describe observed behavior to support your interpretations of what was happening in the group."
- When the team reaches an impasse, "ask members to stop and discuss what is preventing them from accomplishing their purposes."
- Finally, ask for feedback from other team members about how well you are fulfilling your role.

## Paying Attention to the Structure of Teams

Effective work teams must be aware of both content and process. In other words, effective teams pay as much attention to how they structure their work as to how they actually do the work.

Team trainers emphasize both structure and process when doing initial training. During training, members learn to think and talk about the work they are doing and how they are functioning as a team. And on an ongoing basis, team members need to discuss both content and process. "Part of the culture of a group is to talk about the structure of their work and process," Vollmer said.

Vollmer has noticed teams are thinking more about processes such as the steps for problem-solving and different decision-making models. They are evaluating the work they do and what research says about particular issues. They are asking questions such as, "What data do we have to help us make this decision? How do we want to gather input to get a bigger picture of our stakeholders' viewpoints?" There are always those strands of questioning and reflecting going on" in well-structured teams, she said.

## Initial Training

Robert Kessler (1992), superintendent of Reed Union School District in Tiburon, California, describes how hiring a trainer early on helped his district "analyze our personal styles and develop effective group dynamics." This training enabled the new team to form team agreements: "to commit to operate by consensus, respect one another's styles, speak honestly, and advocate the team's decisions to our constituencies." Since everyone's goal is the same—consensus—members listen carefully to each other's concerns, and when members raise objections, they also provide suggestions to reach consensus.

Maeroff advocates sending team members outside the institution for specialized training if possible. Team members "can be steeped in knowledge of the change process and transformed into a team by the experiences in an institute or academy designed specifically for building teams." During such training, team members learn about group-process skills, research theories of social organization, "practice techniques that they can use to engage their colleagues in analyzing conditions in their school, and consider how to develop a plan for change with their colleagues" (Maeroff). Superintendent Bud Scarr said in an interview that successful teams are willing to spend time up front evaluating the way they work together.

And Helphand offers the following tips for building a team: establish team agreements or ground rules (the operating principles), develop a mission statement clarifying the team's overall purpose, write a shared vision statement illustrating what the team plans to accomplish, and list the specific steps the team will take to accomplish its mission.

Clarifying the mission statement is perhaps the most important step. Team members must be able to answer the question "Why am I here?" to perform constructive work, says Helphand. "If a mission statement is not developed and agreed to by the team, each individual will form his or her own idea of the team's purpose."

Even when the mission is clear, the team membership is diverse, and the roles and responsibilities are outlined, every work team encounters some of the common barriers described in the next chapter. But if team members are well trained in group dynamics, they will understand that communication problems and personality conflicts are merely part of the team process.

## How Decisions Get Made

- *By authority*: decisions made by the chairperson or someone else who has been delegated authority by the group. Sometimes these decisions are made after consulting with the group; sometimes not. Setting an agenda is one example of this type of decision-making.
- *Majority rule:* decisions arrived at through voting. Those on the losing side of a vote may have little commitment to the decision, so this style of decision-making is best used with decisions of lesser importance.
- *By minority:* decisions made when fewer than half the members are involved. A task force or committee decision is an example. A council should decide beforehand whether a task force or committee will have the authority to make a final recommendation.
- *Averaging individual opinions:* decisions arrived at by polling individuals for their opinions. The opinion expressed most frequently becomes the decision of the group. This process is somewhat like majority rule except no discussion occurs and the decision can be made by any combination of numbers in the group.
- *Consensus:* decisions arrived at through discussion of all possible alternatives, where everyone has had plenty of opportunity to be heard, and where, ultimately, everyone believes the final choice is the best that can be made under the circumstances. This style of decision-making can take a long time but it creates the highest commitment so it is the style most appropriate for important decisions.

—Source: Kansas State Board of Education (1992)

*Chapter 5*

# Challenges and Problem-Solving

*They weren't a team. While every employee was individually talented, the seven managers didn't work effectively together. If they had been a dog team mushing to Nome, they'd have careened over the first cliff they found.*
—Lynne Curry-Swann (1995)

The implementation of quality work teams in both business and education has not been without problems. For example, Kevin Cooney of Whirlpool told the *Wall Street Journal* that his company abandoned quality circles because "the meetings weren't sufficiently focused, and the workers didn't understand the objective. They ended up discussing a lot of 'tangential' issues, including 'the color of paint in the restroom'" (Amal Kumar Naj 1993). This chapter lists common barriers to team success and ways to overcome them.

## Why Teams Fail

There are five major reasons why teams fail to work together effectively, according to Larry Lozette in *Effective School Improvement:* (1) members don't understand "the function, purpose, or goals of the team effort," (2) members don't understand their roles or responsibilities, (3) members don't understand "how to do their tasks or how to work as part of a team," (4) members fail to "buy into" the "function, purpose, or goals of the team effort," and (5) members "reject their roles or responsibilities."

Superintendent Scarr said team members often "become so attached to one another psychologically and emotionally that the very purpose of the team is defeated because you don't want to hurt someone's feelings." Teams

### Obstacles to Effective Team Discussions

- Talking: You can't "receive" while you're sending.
- Thinking of what you are going to say when you're supposed to be listening.
- Mentally arguing with the person who is talking.
- Preoccupation: Thinking about something else while someone else is talking.
- Impatience: Feeling annoyed with the speaker.
- Poor environment: Noise or other distractions in the room; physical discomfort.
- Divided attention: Trying to pay attention to someone or something at the same time as you are listening to someone else.
- Not realizing that listening is work: Listening is not passive. The listener must work to listen and absorb what the speaker is saying.
- Mental criticism of grammar or appearance.
- Mental or physical fatigue.
- Failure to "see" the speaker: Meaning is conveyed through expressions, tone, and gestures as well as words.
- Two senders, no receivers: Two people talking at each other at the same time.

Source: Kansas State Board of Education

sometimes assume such a congenial relationship that members "almost feel obligated not to ask questions and challenge ideas."

Another reason teams run into problems, Scarr said, is "they've forgotten the fundamental principle behind why they were formed. You have to formulate the principles of the team, and agree on those roles. A good example of that is school boards; they almost never universally do the very crucial step" of formulating a team.

## Individual Behaviors That Prevent Team Effectiveness

Vollmer (no date) lists several behaviors that are "directed at individual needs rather than toward the task of the group." Such self-oriented behaviors can occur, she notes, "when groups fail to recognize or deal with any of four underlying emotional issues of members": control, needs and goals, identity, and acceptance of intimacy. By learning to express themselves in "a more helpful, healthy way," team members can avoid using these negative behaviors:

- *Blocking*: interferes with the progress of the team by going off on a tangent; cites personal experiences unrelated to the team's problem; continues arguing a point the rest of the team has resolved; rejects ideas without consideration; prevents a vote/consensus.
- *Attacking*: criticizes or blames others; shows hostility toward the team or some individual without relation to what has happened in the team; attacks the motives of others; deflates the ego or status of others.
- *Seeking recognition*: attempts to get attention by excessive talking, extreme ideas, boasting, boisterousness.

- *Pleading special interest*: introduces or supports ideas related to one's own pet concerns or philosophies beyond reason; attempts to speak for "the people on the shop floor," "management," or so forth.
- *Withdrawing*: acts indifferently or passively; resorts to excessive formality; doodles or reads; whispers to others.
- *Dominating*: tries to assert authority in manipulating the team or certain members of it by "pulling rank"; gives directions authoritatively; interrupts contributions of others; talks too much.

By using positive communication techniques—such as agreeing with part of an argument, asking for more specific objections or information, offering solutions, postponing a discussion, disclosing feelings, communicating wants and needs, and listing options to choose from—team members can deal with all these barriers (Vollmer interview).

Huntting describes a work team she is on where a member takes things personally: "If you don't agree with her, she gets angry." Huntting says it's important for team members to realize they are not always going to be on the winning side; nobody is. "That's part of being in a democracy. The majority rules."

Sometimes a team member dominates the discussion. To address this problem, some facilitators specify a time limit, Huntting said, but in the teams she's been on, most do not. "They just let the members talk. The facilitator sometimes has to step in and say, 'I think that we've belabored this point; let's go on'."

Sometimes you can actually have groups that don't produce due to policies, union issues, laws, and procedures that people do or don't understand, said Ernie Keller of the Wasco ESD. "You just don't do much around schools where legal issues don't come up," Keller adds. He's been on teams where people have used the threat of a legal problem as an excuse to avoid moving ahead. "Every group ought to have someone to steer them around such disasters," he said. Keller believes policies don't need to deter teams because "for every problem, there's a creative solution waiting to be uncovered."

Sometimes stakeholders who aren't members of a team but are represented by a team can become a barrier to team success. One way teams can ensure stakeholder support is for team members to share the team's ideas and findings frequently with stakeholders. Otherwise, teams will be no more effective than traditional management. As one teacher said: "Years ago we had teacher isolation, and then once we reorganized, we had team isolation" (Sharon Kruse and Karen Seashore Louis 1995).

## Barriers to Team Success

Perhaps the most important factor influencing team success is the attitude of team members toward problems that arise. Members must realize that several common barriers will almost certainly appear. Knowing this and understanding how to respond will keep the team from panicking or getting off track. Maeroff explains: "Every attempt by a team to improve a school is a tale of struggles to overcome obstacles. Schools are not institutions that wait passively to be changed. When it comes to building teams, there are major barriers that must be breached." Maeroff identifies these major barriers as follows:

- *Societal factors*. When issues such as safety in the school environment are a problem, team-building "can easily be seen as a frivolity, and the work of teams is certain to be more difficult."
- *Budgets*. "Team building costs extra money," and "anything that adds to school budgets these days begins at a disadvantage."
- *Unions*. Inflexible unions can constrain teams.
- *Teachers' knowledge*. Building teams will not fix problems such as a teacher's lack of knowledge in a subject area or lack of commitment.
- *Team functioning*. "The lack of a clearly defined mission can defeat a team as readily as having unsuitable members."
- *School schedules*. Teachers are often so busy it is difficult if not impossible to add time for teamwork to their schedules; schools are often reluctant to redesign existing schedules so that teamwork and restructuring can take place.
- *Continuity of staffing*. When school personnel are "transitory," moving from school to school, the time and money expended on building a solid team are wasted.

## Problem Solving

All these problems are solvable, says Maeroff. Schools must recognize that teams will help build unity and comradeship. Money spent on team-building is money well spent. Be aware that teaming will not solve everything, including changing those who do not want to change or who are "incapable of improvement." As for improving team functioning, a clear mission and an understanding of how that mission will be put into place will strengthen the team. Teachers on teams should be allowed more flexibility in their schedules, and principals and other team members must make a commitment to staying at a particular school for several years to ensure an effec-

tive, consistent team.

If stakeholders are aware that team-building is a "promising vehicle for school change," says Maeroff, they may provide incentives for "overcoming the barriers and for making more extensive use of teams for changing schools." To gain support, team-building should "not diverge far from the areas of greatest educational need." In other words, work teams should focus on student needs, as Maeroff states:

> "The greatest value of teams will be as vehicles for bringing improvements to teaching and learning. This means that members of teams have the special responsibility not to lose sight of the reasons why they are singled out for the attention they receive. However indirect the route, the needs of students must ultimately justify what occurs in the name of building teams."
>
> —Gene I. Maeroff, 1993

> Team building that seems not to be sufficiently focused on the most serious needs of students runs the risk of appearing peripheral to the show being performed in the main ring. Team building in such circumstances would be little more than another sideshow, and education already has more than enough of these.

Stephen N. Elliott and Susan M. Sheridan (1992) recommend the following problem-solving strategies for a multidisciplinary team concerned with a student issue such as improving student test scores:

*Step 1.* Define and clarify the presenting problem. The team "must state the presenting problem in concrete, explicit terms" to avoid vagueness and ambiguity.

*Step 2.* Analyze the context of the problem. Team members should look at assessment information such as test scores and evaluate it to understand the problem.

*Step 3.* Brainstorm alternative solutions. Four brainstorming techniques will be useful here: (1) Together, team members should list as many possible solutions as they can. (2) Creative thinking should be encouraged. (3) During these first two steps, no judgments should be made on the listed alternatives. And (4) members should try combining and modifying the alternatives in order to find additional solutions.

*Step 4.* Choose among the alternatives. "After careful consideration of all alternatives, the team selects the solution or solutions that it believes will be most appropriate."

*Step 5.* Specify responsibilities and timelines. "High-quality solutions are sometimes not implemented because of a failure to specify clearly each individual team member's responsibilities. This step of the process addresses the who, what, when, and where aspects of agreed-on solutions."

*Step 6.* Obtain consensus of team. "At this point in the process, the team's leader should check with the members to ensure that there is a consensus regarding future actions to be initiated as a result of the meeting. If a lack of consensus exists, it may be necessary to go back to a prior step in the

problem-solving process."

*Step 7.* Plan for future actions on unaddressed problems. If there are multiple problems or issues, and time constraints prevent them from being addressed, "the team should explicitly discuss the process of how other problems will be handled."

*Step 8.* Follow up. After the team meeting concludes, at least one team member should follow up. "Follow-up provides an opportunity for adjusting intervention plans and also provides team members with feedback about their decisions."

Almost everyone interviewed for this Bulletin advocated hiring trainers to teach group communication skills early on. "A day or two to do the training works every time," said Scarr. "The team must be willing to make that kind of investment. Let's take the family unit, which is a team. Families that are successful work out the ground rules of how they're going to operate the family unit." Most teams need to work out the ground rules more than once. When someone quits, said Scarr, "what they don't understand is that the whole chemistry of the team is ruined. You have to start over. It's almost like getting a divorce, and then getting a new boyfriend or girlfriend. Everything changes." Training helps the "new" group to trust one another. Scarr admits that training takes time, but "you have to spend some time to save some time." Training work teams in group skills might take a day or two; retraining when a new member joins will probably take one to two hours, he said.

Vollmer advocates ongoing training for team members. Training can help team members to understand the structures, strategies, and philosophy of quality work teams and move to a higher level of "teamness"; that is, it can enhance their understanding of group dynamics and show them how to lead effective meetings, how to ask for help from a consultant or secure someone to intervene, and how to deal with conflict. "Members need to know something about what makes for quality work teams. At the onset, teams need training in teamwork yet tend to resist it, too."

It takes both knowledge and skills to be an effective team, and outside consultants can teach these things. When Vollmer trains groups, she often focuses on content and process simultaneously and models group structures and strategies. "I will facilitate one more meetings and include, during the meetings, some mini-lessons as a way to expedite that learning," said Vollmer. "I'll also work with the principal and the facilitator to learn about and design an agenda. I will model for them how to be an effective facilitator."

In summary, teams must be willing to seek help whenever something is bogging them down. Training is key to overcoming barriers and helping team members learn how to lead effective meetings, communicate with one

another, and move from being a congenial team to a collaborative team. Once team members are aware of barriers they may encounter, they will want to know what qualities are found in effective work teams, which is the focus of the next chapter.

*Chapter 6*

# Successful Teams

*Want to create a team-oriented organization? Create a vision. Nothing unifies an organization more than a sense of shared direction and a framework of prioritized short- and long-term goals.*
—Lynne Curry-Swann

This chapter synthesizes tips gleaned from research and experience concerning what makes a team successful.

## The Importance of Time

Elaine Huntting, a parent who is active on many school teams, told of a guest speaker who, at a recent school council meeting, advised team members to be brief and stay on topic. "That's exactly what parents want to hear," Huntting said. "We're all so busy, especially the kind of parents who volunteer for teams. I don't have time for funny stories."

In the Salem-Keizer School District, said Deputy Superintendent Carol Davis, "We tell the committees, 'Your work is for this much time.' When you have community people volunteering on your team, you need a timeframe." The organizational-effectiveness team in Davis's district, a temporary team, finished its work and turned in its report, then, its mission achieved, disbanded. The student learning-goals team, on the other hand, is an ongoing team.

The facilitator should make sure a clear agenda is distributed at least five working days before each meeting, said Keller. Limit meetings to an hour if possible, he advises. "If you hold people too long, you'll have trouble getting them back for the next meeting." Be organized and move along. Also, sometimes the facilitator needs to move meetings to different locations as a public-relations strategy to accommodate those who must commute long distances.

### Characteristics of High-Performing Teams

- a shared sense of purpose and vision
- open communication
- mutual respect, trust, and understanding between members
- useful creative conflict
- appropriate working methods
- appropriate leadership
- regular review and reflection
- enabling and encouraging individual development
- sound links with other teams
- fun and comradeship
- the celebration of success and failure

—Murgatroyd and Morgan

Even so, teams take time, and members must understand this. As John Lindelow and Scott Bentley (1989) write:

> It is always more difficult to make group decisions than it is for a lone administrator to make a command decision. But it is from this investment of extra time and effort that the benefits of team management spring. Thus, successful team management depends on the commitment of all team members to the system and on their willingness to spend the extra time and effort needed for shared decision-making.

Teams that have achieved their initial purpose should either disband or shift their focus. For example, when the technology committee that Huntting is on was initiated, its mission was to determine what direction a computer program would go and how a $20,000 grant would be spent. After that was decided, the same team adopted a new mission: planning a once-a-month family night where the computer lab would be open for parents to work at school with their children.

## Steps for Success

Effective teams take specific steps when addressing problem areas. According to David Johnson and Roger Johnson (1989), they

> establish a cooperative structure, identify and define the problem, gather information about the nature and magnitude of the problem, formulate and consider alternative solutions, ... decide on which solution to adopt, present and advocate the solution to the entire staff, and evaluate the extent and success of the implementation.

The Kansas State Board of Education says that in effective teams all members "feel responsible for the team, the goals it has set, and the success of its activities." Also, all members are allowed to express their views before important decisions are made together. Meeting agendas and activities are specifically planned, but the team can change these if the need arises. In addition, when members try new skills, the team is supportive. Finally, the team engages in an ongoing process of self-evaluation.

## Effective Meetings

According to Vollmer (no date), four features characterize effective meetings: "a balanced mixture of task and maintenance functions, with an edge given to sticking to the task, many more group-oriented actions than self-oriented actions, wide dispersal of leadership roles, and adequate follow-through to permit a decision made at the meeting to result in the expected actions."

### Preparing Before the Meeting

The Kansas State Board of Education reminds team members that "effective meetings don't just happen, they are planned." Before a meeting, members need to know its purpose and expected results; understand who the chairperson is and what his or her role is; name a recorder; arrange the meeting space so members can see each other comfortably; distribute needed documents; set a clear agenda, priorities, and time limits; and, perhaps most importantly, allow enough time for the group to discuss how it is functioning.

### Conducting the Meeting

During each meeting, team members should follow these basic guidelines (Kansas State Board of Education):

- Review the agenda and make changes as necessary. Make sure everyone is clear about and in agreement with the tasks to be accomplished.
- As agenda items come up, first focus on progress made since the last meeting, then discuss areas where problems arose and consider options for resolution.
- Summarize the discussion often.
- Be aware of how the council is arriving at decisions and test to see if group members are in agreement with the methods they are using.
- If the council reaches an impasse and can't seem to resolve an issue, stop the group and spend some time discussing what might be getting in the way.
- State next steps clearly.
- Start and end on time.

## Guidelines for Communication

The Institute for Educational Leadership (1994) offers the following tips to ensure quality communication in teamwork: limit talking time by remembering there are others in the group, don't interrupt, listen actively, allow others to be silent if they wish but try to elicit their views by asking questions or their opinions, encourage rather than dominate, offer *constructive* criticism (build up instead of tear down), accept others' opinions even if you don't agree with them, and support those who are unfairly attacked.

How team members treat each other is perhaps the most important part of team success. "I find that people need to be fairly frank about things," said Keller, "but generally teams work a lot better if people treat each other with respect."

Team members respond to one another with respect to differences or conflict in five basic ways, said Keller. The first is *accommodation*, which means smoothing over or letting others have their way.

The second, *compromise,* is a lose-lose model, said Keller. "It's probably the worst conflict-resolution tool because generally all or both sides involved have to give up something important. And it almost always sets the stage for another round of conflict about unresolved issues and unmet expectations. It's the one that's most often used in collective bargaining, and the one that judges, politicians, and attorneys often use." In a positive sense, it is a sharing model.

The third, *competition,* occurs when one person loses and one person wins. Competing tends to be forcing and divisive, Keller warned, and makes it difficult to bring that same team together again.

The fourth, *avoidance behavior,* exists when team members withdraw, which can at times be very effective, said Keller. The members "refuse to play." Avoidance tends to be used in rural communities more because team members "can't stand to have outright conflict

### Recipe for a Successful Team

- *Clarity in team goals.* A team works best when everyone understands its purpose and goals.
- *Clearly defined roles.* Teams operate more efficiently if group members know who is responsible for what issues and tasks.
- *Clear, open communication.* Good discussions depend on how well information is passed among team members.
- *Beneficial team behaviors.* Teams should encourage all members to use the skills and practices that make discussions and meetings more effective. Teams should respect differences of group members.
- *Well-defined decision procedures.* A team should always be aware of the different ways it reaches decisions.
- *Balanced participation.* A team benefits from the contributions of all team members.
- *Established ground rules.* The team should discuss and set group norms early on in its existence.
- *Awareness of group process and content.* All team members should be aware of how the team is functioning.

—Margot Helphand (1994)

in a setting of high interdependence." If avoidance behavior dominates, it can ruin the team, Keller warned.

The fifth is *collaboration*, which Keller simply defined as team members getting their desired outcomes through constructive problem-solving. Many teamwork consultants refer to this as "consensus."

Helphand's definition helps clarify the collaborative goal of work teams: "Consensus is finding a proposal acceptable enough that all members can support it; no member opposes it." Consensus does not mean complete or unanimous agreement, but "general agreement"; therefore, said Helphand, "even though a decision may not necessarily be an individual's first choice, he or she considers it a workable approach and in the best interest of the group."

Even though collaboration is the ultimate goal of a work team, Keller said all five types of responses have their place. Teams strive for collaboration while using the others—particularly accommodating—to avoid "needless personality clashes and keep the team moving toward its goals."

"Using the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model instrument is a geat way for individuals to see their preferred conflict management style with respect to the five modes above," said Keller.

### Trust

It is essential for team members, especially initially, to work hard at developing a sense of trust among themselves. Snyder and Anderson contend that team success "depends on group skill in developing trust and openness,

## How Team Members Can Ensure Success

The formality or informality of a team does not determine its success. More important is the thinking and planning that is invested in the team. Members need to be aware of why the work team exists, what its mission is, and who it reports to. In addition, each team member can do specific things to help ensure the team's success, according to the Kansas State Board of Education:

- initiate ideas, make suggestions for procedures, and propose tasks
- ask for clarification of what has been said and seeking suggestions and ideas from others
- express what they think or feel and offering information
- clear up points of confusion, offer examples, and clarify alternatives before the group
- summarize discussions so the group knows what it has accomplished
- test the practicality of suggestions by applying them to real situations
- check to see if decisions have been reached or the work of the group is almost concluded
- keep channels of communication open and encourage everyone to make contributions
- help others reconcile their disagreements, find common ground, and recognize their similarities as well as their differences
- encourage others by listening with interest to what they say and by being warm, friendly, and responsible to them

in reacting to feedback and in developing a sense of community with itself as a team, and within the whole of the school."

Lindelow and Bentley also stress the importance of trust and commitment:

> Team members must trust the superintendent to respect and implement the team's decisions. Team members must also feel free to disagree with the superintendent without the fear of falling into disfavor. The superintendent, in turn, must have trust and confidence in the team to make intelligent decisions for the district. Each team member must trust that the others are working primarily for the good of the district.

Scarr, despite his belief that the term *trust* is overused in literature about teamwork, advises team members to perform initial exercises in trust-building, wherein each team member makes a commitment to ensure that the team is functional. As part of this process, operating principles should be defined and written down. Unless team members participate in defining these principles, said Scarr, "they are just a bunch of words." He encourages hiring a consultant to train work teams.

### When Is Consensus Desirable?

Consensus, when all members of a work team agree, is desirable in the following situations:

- when you need or can benefit from an open debate of all the issues
- when there are many interested parties with differing needs—whose work is highly interdependent
- when the people who must carry out a decision have a valuable perspective concerning the best decision
- when you want to ensure "buy-in"
- when you have sufficient time to brief individuals and discuss
- when you want to lay the groundwork for long-term teamwork

Consensus may not be desirable in the following situations:

- when you have decided that the decision is not up for discussion; it is outside the scope of the team
- when there is a crisis and there is no time to reach consensus; immediate action is required
- when the team does not have the technical expertise required to make the decision

Source: Margot Helphand (1994)

**The Necessity of Conflict**

It may come as a surprise to some, but conflict is actually an essential element in successful teams. Effective teams "engage in controversy to ensure that all alternative solutions get a fair hearing" (Johnson and Johnson). And while negative personal attacks on others should be discouraged, "differing views about tasks, policies, procedures, allocation of resources, and other group issues can actually be helpful" (Helphand).

Vollmer says conflict is usually caused by one of the following: "differentiation of function, power struggles between persons or subsystems, role conflicts, differences in interpersonal style among participants, or stress

imposed on participants by external forces" (no date). Vollmer emphasized that team members must be trained in conflict resolution or "they're always off task and will get frustrated." Conflict is a natural part of team decision-making, and members need to understand this, said Vollmer. "Conflict can be very helpful to a group's work if they can sustain and get through the emotional level, because great ideas come out of it."

Keller agrees: "Conflict is a powerful engine. Sometimes the fact there's a conflict might be the very reason people show up for a meeting." And finally, conflict often eventually leads to consensus.

**Facilitators' Techniques for Handling Conflict**

### Ground Rules for Discussion

To ensure team discussions are productive, members should do the following:

- Come prepared to talk about agenda items. If everyone does his or her homework, meetings will be more efficient and decisions more effective.
- Listen carefully to what others say. Try to understand their point of view. See if you can learn something from them.
- If you don't understand what is being said, say so. Ask for examples and illustrations.
- Join in the discussion. Don't wait to be called on. Say what you think. The other council members need to know your thoughts on the subject.
- Don't speak too long or so often that others do not have a chance to speak.
- Disagree when necessary, but keep it friendly. State why you hold your opinion, but don't insist on having it adopted by others.
- Never argue a question or point of fact. It is a waste of time. Look up the answer or have someone do it for the next meeting.

—Source: Kansas State Board of Education

Facilitators can use several techniques for managing conflict, says Helphand. These include asking for other points of view—even asking someone to play "devil's advocate." The facilitator can raise questions or ask for clarification, being careful to dissociate the idea from its originator (instead of asking, "What do you think of Mary's idea?" ask "What do you think about the suggestion to move the office?"). Place attention on the problem, not the people working on the problem, says Helphand.

Have the group evaluate itself, letting the group members deal with any offensive behavior or talking to the disruptive members in private. An ingroup confrontation, says Helphand, is a last resort.

# Conclusion

The most effective work teams set clear goals, keep connections strong between the team and other stakeholders such as administrators and teachers, hire a professional trainer initially to teach group communication strategies, and ensure the roles of team members are clearly defined. And always, no matter what the purpose of the team, members are aware that improved student learning is the ultimate mission.

Educators who have experimented with teams generally agree that districts and schools should make use of teams for decision-making, planning, and action. But each individual's qualities and contributions should be recognized and valued as well. Patricia McLagan (1991) says, "The team is not and will not be a total replacement for the individual as a unit of focus.... The team that subsumes individuals instead of enhancing them in some way will not excel."

Successful organizations, she says, have both "high-performing teams and high-performing individuals within and outside of teams."

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57